



Testimony of Lisa Voigt, Ph.D.
Ohio Conference of the American Association of University Professors
Before the House Health Committee
Representative P. Scott Lipps, Chair
August 24, 2021

Chair Lipps, Vice Chair Holmes, Ranking Member Russo and Members of the Health Committee:

My name is Lisa Voigt. I am a professor at The Ohio State University and Secretary of the Ohio Conference of the American Association of University Professors (OCAAUP), which represents over 6,000 college and university faculty across the state.

I submit this testimony to express my association's opposition to House Bill 248 and the restrictions that it would impose on public and private institutions of higher education -- restrictions that would limit the autonomy of our colleges and universities to make their own decisions about vaccination requirements, recommendations, and disclosures for members of campus communities.

Faculty members already have to deal with the reality that COVID-19 vaccinations are not mandated at Ohio's institutions while we are expected to resume face-to-face instruction during a surge in delta variant cases. Some of our institutions have created incentives to encourage vaccinations, following the lead of Gov. DeWine. To pass HB 248 -- a bill that would prohibit any vaccine mandates or even incentives to get vaccinated -- would further risk the health of faculty, students, and staff.

For many years, we have lived under various vaccination requirements for students to attend schools. At colleges and universities, for example, immunizations against meningococcal meningitis and hepatitis B for students seeking residence in on-campus housing has been the norm. These immunizations are recommended by the CDC for college students residing on campus, and required by law in many states including Florida, Indiana, Michigan, Missouri, and Texas.¹ That is because students living in dorms are at higher risk of the transmission of those diseases.² HB 248 would repeal the current Ohio law that requires college students to disclose their vaccination status to the college or university when seeking to reside in on-campus housing. To reverse course on this disclosure requirement could lead to obvious negative public health repercussions on college campuses.

Unfortunately, public health has become deeply politicized in the name of freedom. We believe in freedom, but not when that freedom jeopardizes the health, safety, and well-being of students, faculty, and staff. All rights carry related responsibilities, and in this case, individual freedom must take into account the good -- the health -- of the whole community. Prohibiting universities from even "requesting" that students receive vaccines, as this bill does, is an extreme form of government overreach that endangers public health.

¹ <https://www.immunize.org/laws/menin.asp>

² <https://www.passporthealthusa.com/2018/11/why-is-meningitis-more-common-in-college-students/>

One need only to look at the school district in Hillsborough, Florida where thousands of students and staff have become infected by COVID-19 due to a lack of vaccinations and a lack of a masking requirement. It is a cautionary tale of what happens when public health is “made optional.” We do not need to tempt fate in Ohio by passing more legislation that threatens the health and safety of Ohioans, particularly vulnerable young people.

As faculty, we trust the scientific process and firmly believe in the expertise of trained professionals, including scientists, immunologists, physicians, and public health experts. The vast majority of these experts support vaccinations, and we should trust their guidance. There is a reason that a Health Committee even exists within our legislature. This is a recognition that health is not merely a personal choice, but in the public interest.

Thank you for your time and consideration.